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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an innovative approach to finding an appropriate setting for preservice teachers to practice teaching methods and skills. Microteaching to peers is most common in teacher preparation, but it has obvious flaws in gaining realistic responses to questions and genuine discussion of topics presented. Teaching to actual students is preferred but it needs to be in a situation that is free of discipline problems to provide freedom for experimentation and practice. In the program described, secondary preservice teachers prepare short lessons and teach them to small classes of international students who are studying English as a Second Language at the English Language Institute. These international students practice listening and note-taking skills, ask questions, and engage in discussion about the material presented. Thus, the future teachers have a real class for practice in which they can safely try out various teaching strategies without fear of discipline problems. Also, interesting benefits result from the cross-cultural nature of the exchange. (Author/JD)

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Micro-Teaching
With a Multicultural Focus

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Running Head: Micro-Teaching with a Multicultural Focus

SP 032 814

MICRO-TEACHING WITH A MULTICULTURAL FOCUS

Background

We are excited to be sharing with you what has been developing over the last three years as a collaborative venture between participants in our teacher preparation program in the Department of Education and international students learning English as a Second Language (ESL) at the English language Institute.

The Problem from the Student Teacher Perspective

Heidelberg College, founded in 1850, is a small private liberal arts institution in rural northwest Ohio. We have a strong teacher education department with an emphasis on early field experience as well as subject matter competence. One of these is a general methods course at the junior level for future secondary teachers, and that is how this project got started.

We firmly believe that teaching is a performing art comparable to acting, playing music, or Olympic figure skating. It requires a great deal of practice and the development of skills of communication that require spontaneity and the ability to adjust to the audience. It is like dramatic improvisation that must feed upon the students' reactions and understanding--not like a science that can be learned by the memorization of formulas or lists of rules.

Since teaching requires this dynamic interaction and practice, we had great difficulty, say, trying to teach our students how to give a good lecture simply by giving them a list of guidelines, or teaching them how to lead a good discussion simply by modeling one for them in our class. They needed a chance to try out different skills of teaching in an interactive yet non-threatening setting, to receive feedback, and to try again with different methods or approaches.

One of these opportunities could be their field placement settings in secondary schools, which they embark upon after their course work but field settings involve risks: discipline problems, classes used to the traditional methods of their regular teacher and threats

of phone calls from worried parents if the approach is too novel or if the class is conducted in too amateurish a fashion.

Consequently, we needed a way for beginning pre-service teachers to get started that wouldn't run those risks. The traditional way is to divide the teacher education students into small groups and have them teach each other. Called "Micro-teaching", this is supposed to provide a simulated teaching-learning situation, and according to current research is used in over 80 percent of teacher training institutions.

It has obvious flaws, however. The other so-called students are not really interested in learning the material; they are apt to be thinking more about the lesson they will teach later than the one that is being presented now; they probably won't ask many questions or enter into discussion of the subject realistically; and they may be afraid to give an honest evaluation of their fellow student teachers since those same students will later on be grading them. Thus, it is not truly interactive and does not help the future teachers develop spontaneity and the ability to change and adapt

their lessons to the ebb and flow of a classlike atmosphere.

As we were searching for a more realistic setting for our students to practice their teaching skills, we became aware that our English Language Institute was looking for college teachers who were willing to have students sit in on classes in order to practice their listening and note-taking skills. And we thought, why not let our student teachers practice lecturing while the ESL students practice these receptive skills? Could we make that work out to the advantage of both?

The Problem from the ESL Perspective

There is a paradox that exists in every language classroom: Language is a means, not an end in itself. In teaching college preparatory ESL classes, there exists a puzzle: How can we teach language skills and academic content at the same time? ESL students need to develop their language skills in the context of academic coursework in order to survive in academia.

Over the past several years in our ESL classes, we have placed a strong emphasis on bridging the gap between the teaching of language skills and the teaching of academic material. To give an example: We

could teach the language skill of irregular verbs in the past tense, such as the irregular past tense form of the verb 'go' being 'went', and with this information, we could teach the ESL students how to say, "He went to the store". This piece of information, however, is not going to help them survive in economics and biology classes. Thus, the underlying philosophy of bridging this gap requires the ESL instructor to accept a dual responsibility: (a) to teach English language development and (b) to incorporate academic subject content. Having student teachers lecture to our ESL students represents an effective approach to bridge the gap.

Research from Snow & Brinton, 1988, indicates that, especially for second language learners, "successful learning occurs when students are exposed to content material presented in a meaningful contextualized form, with the focus on acquiring information". Studies in Smoke, 1988, show that international students themselves express a need for better preparation to meet the demands and expectations college has for its native and nonnative speakers of English. To achieve this objective, students from

these studies have suggested more interactive instruction and more emphasis on the receptive skills of reading and listening.

With a collaborative method between student teachers and ESL students, the latter can become better prepared by practicing the receptive language skills they need with a focus on acquiring the information presented by the former. These acquired skills can then be transferred to the content courses. As a bonus, they have the opportunity to become socially integrated into the academic community through the interaction with the student teachers, which, at best, may end in the development of international friendships and, at least, results in an international exchange. Both are very positive accomplishments for our academic community. Finally, the intercultural awareness is another tremendous benefit of this experience for my future teachers, for they will be teaching in a pluralistic society and need to be aware of cultural diversity and how to deal with it comfortably.

Procedure

Specifically, how does this work? In our teaching methods class, students are given guidelines for a good lecture; taught about set induction, focusing event, or assessment of prior knowledge to open their presentation; helped with visual aids in their "Media and Material class", and taught to write well-organized lesson plans. They are also told about the particular students who will be in the class they are teaching. We discuss the countries they are from, and any possible problems that might present, such as the inappropriateness of a lecture on the health problems of alcohol to Muslim students who would see alcoholism as a sin rather than a health hazard, or the difficulties of a lecture on, say, the "Electoral College" that one of my students proposed (we got him to change to a lecture on voter registration and voting which was much more effective! Even American students have trouble with the Electoral College!) Another student ran into problems with what we thought would be an excellent opening to her lecture on the US Congress when she began with some questions to the largely Japanese class about the Japanese Legislature only to

find out that most of them didn't know much about it, so she ended up lecturing on that before she could begin her lecture on our Congress!

Each student wrote a lesson plan for a mini-lesson of some 20 minutes in their subject field. After appropriate corrections and suggested adjustments, they were assigned to an ESL class for a period when they could present their lessons. At the beginning of the class period, the American students and international students introduce themselves: where they are from, intended major, why they came to Heidelberg, career plans, all in an attempt to "break the ice". One Japanese student said he came to Heidelberg so he could make American friends, and that statement really seemed to reach out to the teacher education students. One of the student teachers responded with a statement that he thought he had met that young man at one of the opening weeks' orientation activities. Another of the student teachers mentioned that she knew one of the international students' roommates. These friendly remarks seemed to help a great deal to open up the class and put things on a <u>personal basis</u> so that the international students weren't afraid to ask questions.

We also placed name cards on the table in front of the students so that the student teachers would be able to call on them by name, even if it was a difficult one.

One of the greatest advantages of this kind of teaching experience for our student teachers was that the international students really want to understand the material, asking for repetition, asking for words to be written on the board, asking for examples just as real learners. (e.g., One poignantly asked, "Would you mind repeating that in smaller words?")

When a basketball player kept referring to getting into the "key" before shooting the ball, a puzzled student queried, "Just how can you get into a key?" And the teacher, being resourceful, held up a picture of Larry Bird he had used earlier, pointed to the lines on the court behind him that outlined the "key", and then went to the board and drew a clearer diagram with the "key" labeled.

Another ESL student was having trouble with terms used about the American system of representation, and with a puzzled look and polite deference he asked, "Please, sir, just what does this word re-pre-sen-ta-tive mean?" And the student teacher threw aside his

prepared lesson plan and explained in simple terms how we elect representatives in the same way their own class might choose someone to represent them in bringing some problem or concern to the student government on campus. It was a magic moment of teaching/learning.

The lessons are video-taped, and the student teachers view the tapes and write a self-evaluation of their presentation, as well as a general evaluation later of the whole project. As one of them wrote in this open-ended evaluation,

> I learned that you cannot assume your students have all the background knowledge you might expect. It is more like teaching in a normal class because so many students in high school today simply do not have all the prior knowledge you think they should have, and this is a great way to learn to deal with this situation.

Another student-teacher wrote in a similar vein,

> I learned a lot from teaching them because the material is new to the students, and you really have to work to break it down so that they can comprehend.

Another wrote,

> I actually felt like a teacher for the first time. I worked with the students and helped them learn, and it was an exciting feeling.

During a lecture by one of our health education students on smoking, the students got into a fascinating discussion about the laws regarding smoking and drinking in their various countries, and what they thought about our laws here. And during a social studies lecture on marriage and the family, a student teacher nearly died of shock when, after presenting some statistics on divorce, a Middle East student told her that the penalty for adultery in her country was death by stoning. This is truly experiential multicultural awareness that could never be duplicated in an ordinary class.

Evaluation

Part of the whole process is an evaluation by the ESL students. One evaluation is individual, done immediately following each presentation. This individual evaluation form is discussed and the vocabulary is explained beforehand. The form makes them aware of the different methods used in this

country in the teaching process. Also, they can observe that learning how to teach is a process in itself and it varies from culture to culture.

Another evaluation is of the process as a whole. This particular form is adapted from their ESL writing textbook (Schenck, 1988). This is the form we have used to process the information and feedback from the ESL students. In class all semester long they have been evaluating each other's paragraphs or essays using similar forms called "peer review" forms. Using the same process for this project proved to be effective because (a) the students knew exactly what is expected of them; (b) they could remain anonymous; and (c) the same form was used for their peers; thus, they are given the opportunity to see the student teachers as peers also, which helps the ESL students become integrated in the academic community.

Thus far, one step in bridging the gap has been accomplished: Here are some examples from the evaluation form shown earlier. (Please note that they have not been corrected for errors) "When they teach to international students, you should use easy words that they can understand"; and "I recommend to teachers

more approach to student. For instance, while teaching, look at students' eyes or to smile."

Also, the anonymity of this format allows them to express their opinions as directly as they might want, without feeling intimidated by the process. In some cultures,however, suggestions for improvement are not easily made; consequently, this process acculturates the ESL students to the American classroom norms. Here are more examples: "They have to see our eyes"; "they need not just writing, they need make sure students understand"; "they need summary after lecture" and "they need to walk (move) around more. They should change their voice when they say important parts." Obviously, by this time in the semester the students are no longer intimidated to make constructive comments even if it is contrary to their cultural background.

Lastly, it is extremely important for them to realize that the student teachers are their peers. They need more experiences that allow them to be equals. In many situations, ESL students feel handicapped or at a disadvantage in this country. This experience empowers them in a way that they might not have experienced in the U.S. because, in this case,

they need to help the student teachers learn how to teach. They are left with the feeling that they do have something to contribute. The ESL students' comments demonstrate their ability to provide essential, beneficial critiques and to achieve a feeling of camaraderie with the future teachers as part of the academic community.

Again in their own words, "We can run (i.e., learn) each other"; "if we come intimate each other, it would be more fun"; "I like that each student teacher have easy way to teach their subject to us because they were student"; "I think they taught me smilling."

Conclusion

In sum, this collaborative project, has proven to be very helpful for our English Language Institute and our teacher education program. It is an effective way for ESL students to practice their language skills in the context of academic coursework, while they focus on the lecture content. The student teachers develop a global awareness necessary for the cultural diversity found in all classrooms in the 90s. In addition, as a bonus, we are integrating the international students into the community and teaching them about American

teaching methods in preparation for their future academic careers. These are the steps we have taken to bridge the gap.

Academia has a long way to go to help integrate the international students into the American academic lifestyle. Heidelberg College has taken steps in this direction and achieved success. Just one last comment from an international student that will remain in our memories. We would like to remember it for our own teaching: "I felt they were more friendly than real teachers. So I like it."

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

HEIDELBERG ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTITUTE

(Overall Evaluation)

1. What did you like about learning from the student teachers?

2. Could you identify the purpose of each lecture? Were all the activities/exercises related to the purpose?

3. Were the teaching styles appropriate for the audience (i.e., for you)?

4. Were there any lectures/teachers that were unclear?

5. Do you think any of the student teachers needed to add more detail or to eliminate repetitions?

6. What suggestions could you make for improving their teaching?

7. Do you think this type of student teaching lesson should be continued as part of your coursework? Why or why not?

APPENDIX B

(Individual Evaluation)

Lecture Analysis
EDU 340

Lecture's Name _____
Subject _____

Circle your reaction to the statements below: (5=very good and 1=very weak)

1. The lecturer spoke clearly and was easy to understand.

5 4 3 2 1

2. The lecture's pace was good, neither too fast nor too slow.

5 4 3 2 1

3. The lecturer's pace was good, neither too fast nor too slow.

5 4 3 2 1

4. The lecture material was well organized and easy to take notes on.

5 4 3 2 1

5. The lecture began with a stimulating focus event to interest and motivate the class.

5 4 3 2 1

6. The lecture included use of visual aides and/or concrete examples or analogies to help make it effective.

5 4 3 2 1

7. The lecture contained key questions to obtain student feedback and/or used student ideas to develop the topic.

5 4 3 2 1

8. The lecture closed with a summation or review of key points.

5 4 3 2 1

What I liked about the lecture:

Suggestions for improvement:

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Abstract

Micro-teaching has been widely acknowledged as a most important component of teacher education programs. This session will present an innovative approach to finding an appropriate setting for pre-service teachers to practice the methods and skills of teaching. Micro-teaching to peers is most common in teacher preparation, but it has obvious flaws in gaining realistic responses to questions and genuine discussion of topics presented. Teaching to actual students is preferred but it needs to be in a discipline-free situation to provide the freedom for experimentation and practice.

In the program to be described, secondary pre-service teachers prepare short lessons and teach them to small classes of international students who are enrolled in the English Language Institute, studying English as a Second Language. These international students practice listening and note taking skills, ask questions and engage in discussion about the material presented. Thus, the future teacher have a "real" class of students to practice on, and can safely try out various teaching strategies without fear of the discipline problems. Also, interesting benefits as a result of the cross-cultural nature of the exchange will be presented.